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ABSTRACT

Included in Israel's population is a culturally disadvantaged group comprised primarily of immigrants and their children from non-European backgrounds such as North African and Middle Eastern countries. This group has shown a lower level of educational achievement than their European counterparts, and a number of education and social policies have been attempted to improve the situation. Among the efforts was the Fostering Program for the Gifted Disadvantaged, which involved a boarding school project offering gifted adolescents a broad-based enrichment program in academic, technical, agricultural, and maritime areas of education. Special fostering activities included auxiliary lessons, cultural enrichment, social activities, student self-government, and voluntary activities. Described are selection criteria for students, qualifications and functions of teachers and staff, and the program's physical facilities. Findings of a 10-year longitudinal study showed that: (1) more of the boarding students graduated from high school as compared with their cohorts who did not participate in the program, (2) the boarding students attained scores in the matriculation examinations similar to or slightly higher than their non-boarding classmates, and (3) a significantly larger percentage of the boarding students entered post-secondary institutions and attained college degrees. (JDD)

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THE GIFTED DISADVANTAGED - Speech
by Eliezer Shmueli

I would like to present highlights of a 10 year study of a program developed in Israel, for what we have termed "the gifted disadvantaged." The program, and its associated impact evaluation study were directed at those children who came from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Among our population in Israel, this group comprises primarily immigrants and their children from non-European backgrounds such as North African and Middle Eastern countries.

Let me briefly outline some of the characteristics of our population. The absorption of continuous waves of immigration into Israeli society has been a complex phenomenon. A major contributing factor is the great cultural diversity of the immigrant population. The Israeli population may be divided into those of European descent and those of Middle Eastern and North African descent. With respect to the differing integration problems posed by these two different groups, the following factors account for subsequent differences in the process of absorption between these two ethnic groups:

> Social and economic patterns existing in Israel when it was established as an independent state in 1948 had been largely developed by urban Europeans. The Jewish immigrants from Arab-speaking countries, accustomed as they were to agrarian social and cultural patterns, had difficulty adjusting to Israel's social and economic patterns.
>
> European ethnic-origin Jews had undergone successive social and cultural upheaval (most recently having been the Holocaust). A history of such upheavals can be seen as having facilitated changes in attitudes and flexibility towards traditional habits and beliefs. The Jewish communitities from the Arab countries had not undergone this experience and thus tended to be more tightly bound to traditions and beliefs.
>
> European ethnic-origin Jews had had the experience of organizing educational programs and "training centers" for themselves prior to coming to Israel. Such large scale organization did not exist in the Middle Eastern and North African countries, and,
>
> Both middle and lower class ethnic Europeans immigrated to Israel, whereas among the ethnic Middle Eastern and North African immigrant population (in which clear social stratification existed), generally only the lower social strata were to be found among the immigrants to Israel.

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One result of the above differences was an inevitable association of ethnic origin with SES (socio-economic status). Furthermore, large numbers of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants settled together in crowded urban neighborhoods. Their vocational and educational levels were generally low; employment was unstable and did not pay well; birth rate was high (twice that of their European counterparts); and mortality rates, due to improved medical care in Israel, dropped to one quarter of what they had been during the previous generation. Over the first 20 years, a vicious circle evolved which included further overcrowding and pressure upon children to leave school as soon as they could work. Thus the second generation did not have opportunity to rise significantly above their parents' standard of living.

This group of immigrants and their children are often referred to in the literature as "culturally disadvantaged." I hope it is clear that the use of this term is not meant to be value-laden or disparage a particular groups' culture. When we say, for example, that the children of immigrants from Yemen or Kurdistan are culturally disadvantaged, we are not passing judgment on the value orientation or behavioral patterns in traditional agrarian Moselm societies. However, once these immigrant children do find themselves in a situation where they must compete in schools with urban industrialized, predominantly middle class European society, they are in effect at a cultural disadvantage.

It goes without saying that this is a culturally <u>different</u> group -- different from the dominant cultural group in a manner not unlike those children of Black, Puerto Rican or Chicano heritage in the U.S., for example. It is not the quality of a given culture that determines whether the group becomes culturally disadvantaged, but as Moshe Smilansky and David Nevo point out in their 10 year study of the gifted disadvantaged, rather it is the group's ability to function according to dominant group cultural norms in a particular setting.

This group, in any case, has shown a lower level of educational achievement as compared with their European counterparts, from the early 1950s. For example, the Jewish population from the Middle East and North Africa, although it comprises about 50% of Israel's population had an 8th grade passing rate (which would assure the student of a place in one of the secondary "academic" schools), of 10-13% as compared with 40-45% among their European counterparts. In 1956 a decision was made to evaluate this population on a lower normative criteria on the 8th grade national Scholastic Evaluation. Thus, while the regular pass mark was 80%, the pass mark for this population was lowered to 70%. Differential educational attainment could also be seen in the early elementary years. By first grade a disparity in achievement had been reported by Enoch in 1950. Feitelsohn (1953) reported that the gap in reading comprehension achievement between European and Middle Eastern/North African peers became more pronounced by grade 2, and early studies (Smilansky 1957) indicated that this disparity in turn began to effect Middle Eastern/ North African children's attitude toward school. As Smilansky and Nevo report in their study, feelings of inferiority, coupled with the parental view that "school is not the place for me," led to early and high drop out rates.

The above discussion should serve as some background to the growing education problem Israel was facing by the early sixties. Let me turn now to some of the ways that Israel sought to improve this situation, specifically our program for the gifted disadvantaged.

A number of different education and social policy phases were attempted, but here I want to focus on the stage of Israel educational policy of compensatory education during the years 1958-67. During this period, a number of approaches and projects were developed under the auspices of the Ministry of Education with a local institute carrying out experimentation and evaluation. Among the activities approved by the Israeli Education Ministry Pedagogic Council and implemented by the institute were a range of special enrichment and support programs to allow the

disadvantaged pupil more time to adapt, including: long day and/or long year programs; remedial programs in the basic skills; counselling and guidance teachers; youth recreation services; pre-vocational and vocational opportunities; and (of special interest to us here) special enrichment for the gifted among the disadvantaged. The latter special fostering of the more gifted among the disadvantaged, is the program of concern to us today.

The special Fostering Program for the Gifted Disadvantaged was designed to focus on the group in theupper third to upper quartile in ability ratings among the disadvantaged. For this group, three different fostering projects were undertaken -- each with a different orientation and setting:an afternoon and summer enrichment program for upper elementary aged youths; an experiment in intellectual fostering of a selected group of disadvantaged in the University High School at the Hebrew University,and; the boarding school fostering project.

The focus in these special programs was on the group of disadvantaged youngsters that had demonstrated higher motivation, ability, and achievement throughout their elementary education. The project that I will discuss here is the Boarding School Fostering Program.

The Boarding School Program and its organizational design were based on five assumptions:

First, and most important, the existing situation of the culturally disadvantaged ethnic and social groups should not be regarded as indicative of limited potential; that change is possible at an age later than early childhood; that an "emotional crisis" may be used as a positive, pedagogic-therapeutic tool and; because adolescence is a period of search for self-identity, it is a particularly suitable time for fostering resocialization activities, and exploitation of this period may offer the prospect of meaningful change; preference should be given to fostering the more able of the cultural disadvantaged.

The first assumption relates to the question of potential. At the time the first Boarding School Fostering Program was initiated, the 8th grade National Scholastic Survey Test showed that only a small proportion of our target group attained achievement scores high enough for the continuation of academic studies. Only 8.6% of this population attained the 80% percentile (the cutoff score for entrance to academic secondary school), as compared with 39% of their European ethnic origin peers. Perseverence in school was another factor examined at the outset of the Boarding Program. Data from a 1957 survey of elementary school graduates showed that of those who reached the 80+ mark in the survey test, 60.5% of our target population applied to academic secondary schools, compared with 73.5% for their European peers; 37% graduated secondary school, compared with 60% for the European ethnic origin group; and 27 .5% received matriculation certificates, as compared with 55% among the Europeans.

It was assumed here that ability is, to a certain extent, a product of social factors, among others. It was felt that the program could set up an intervention process of resocialization and reorientation to aid in overcoming the first stage of the boarding process.

It was also felt that in order to generate change among adolescents, it would be important to develop the individual's awareness of the need for change and the commitment to work towards change. The program was based on separating adolescents from their homes and communities, putting them in a peer based living arrangement, placing them in schools with high academic requirements and presenting them there with intellectual challenges and putting them in competition with middle class peers, while supporting them to assume the role of gifted and not disadvantaged.

The implementation of the Boarding School Fostering Program required a broad based enrichment program and then in order to foster motivation and raise the level of aspiration, the selected students should be identified to themselves and others as "gifted." The project should have high academic and social status and training should be channeled into different types of institutions so as to maintain the status of different types of institutions as to maintain the status of the institutions in secondary education, and to meet the different and multiple needs of the participants. Throughout the parents are partners in the fostering project and must share in supporting the resocialization and adjustment efforts of the project.

Beginning with the first group in 1961, three criteria were used in the selection process. The first was an ethnic origin criteria which gave preference to the disadvantaged children from the Middle Eastern and North African communities. 80% of the participants came from these communities. About 20% of the available places were alloted to new immigrant children from Eastern Europe who had arrived during the preceding two or three years. The second criterion was a psychological/educational criterion and included selecting the most gifted pupils based on social reports, tests and personal interviews with parents and children. The third criterion was socio-economic. Thus children from the above categrories were admitted only when family conditions -- determined on the basis of a combined index of place of residence, parental education and occupation, family size and size of housing -- made it desirable for the child to leave home for a boarding program. As we gained experience with selection, and as the number of potential candidates grew in subsequent years, the process was appropriately modified.

In the first year, for example, 1200 students with a score of 80+ were identified; 78 were finally selected, by the 1969-70 school year 3,000 students were recommended. After the first round of testing at regional testing centers, 921 candidates were selected for further screening, and 526 were accepted to the freshman class.

Brief Description of the Program

The students in this first fostering project group in 1961 were first housed in a community youth hostel as the boarding home and attended four secondary academic schools in the Jerusalem area. Later, the Boyar Secondary Academic School was built by the project to serve as an experimental boarding school site. By the end of the 1960s, the 1300 students were distributed in 17 institutions for academic as well as technical, agricultural and maritime education in both the secular and religious systems.

In addition to the usual school requirements (including a 6 day school week), the program provided a series of special fostering activities. These include auxiliary lessons such as the preparatory summer camp where trainees spend four weeks prior to admission to secondary school supplementing and improving their knowledge and skills in selected subjects. Since there was a gap between the students' scholastic standing and the requirements of the schools they were to attend, efforts to reduce this gap and begun in the preparatory camp, were continued until the end of their first year -- and in some cases in the higher grades. Hebrew, math, and English were attended to in this way. Instruction was adapted to individual needs and delivered by specialized teachers and instructors at the boarding facilties. The average student spends 4 - 5 hours a day during the first year or years in auxiliary lessons and personal homework; cultural enrichment including informal courses in music, drawing, sculpture, drama and psychology as well as electronics, astronomy and ethnic folklore. The subjects were selected by the administration of the boarding

facility in conjunction with the student council; social activities -- the students were divided into social groups with each group meeting weekly under the leadership of a group instructor to discuss social matters such as problems in Israeli society, adolescence, etc...; student self-government -- students were encouraged to elect representatives to a student council and for various committees dealing with aspects of the boarding home; voluntary activities -- students provided tutoring neighboring elementary schools, gave Hebrew lessons to new immigrant families, worked with the Fire Brigade and the Israeli Red Cross, assisted at institutions for the blind and related work. Each student was required to participate in two hours per week of voluntary work.

In addition to auxiliary lessons the fostering program also provided extensive guidance and tutorial service which includes group instructors, house-mothers, tutors and service personnel. Instructors who serve as group leaders supervise preparation for school, eat with the students, wake them in the morning and generally talk to the students about their experiences, organize evening recreation and supervise night preparations. This particular role has generally been filled by university students and has suffered from high turnover. Later in the project attempts were made to attract more mature group leaders who would be willing to remain for the duration of a four year course. The house mothers serve as substitute mothers for the facility with respect to personal needs, room arrangements, health and cleanliness, etc. Housemothers were often the wives of group instructors, after changes were made regarding the group instructors.

Tutors, qualified teachers, graduate students or professionals give courses in an area of specialization work with the children after school. Initially, many of the turors were the subject teachers of the same students in the morning. Later this proved to be problematric for students having difficulty, and a change of personnel was found to be desirable. Most of the institutions have also added a social worker to their staffs to serve as a bridge

between the institution and the family particularly in times of crisis. At the decade review, psychologists were only partially available to the institutions and it was recommended that improved services in this area were needed.

Physcial facilities -- as mentioned, the project initially was developed to handle a small group of 78 youngsters and was gradually enlarged to serve about 3,000 in a range of alternative institutions. The early project allowed observation in a participant-observer approach. But later, as the project diversified and enlarged, evaluation became more formal and more distant including observation schedules by evaluation staff, interviews with students and personnel, etc. In spite of our early concern about the actual physcial facilities and their effect on the fostering process, our evaluation findings were that the physical facilities influenced this process only to a limited degree. In the early years students were housed 8 - 12 to a room, bunk style with little or no privacy for the student. Following a contribution, a specially designed dormitory was opened at the Boyar School in Jerusalem, in the fourth year of the project. Resources for building and equipment were practically unlimited, but when all was completed, it became clear that the physical plant played only a minor role in the positive fostering of a group of adolescents -- much greater impact could be seen to be due to interpersonal relationships among peers and with the staff.

I have now described the Program, in the time remaining I would like to briefly review some of the findings of our ten year longitudinal study on the results of this program.

As you may recall from earlier, the ethnic origin Middle-Eastern/ North African students in Israel tended to have high dropout rates. One of the hypotheses of the study was that the boarding school fostering program should be able to decrease the drop out rate of these students. The study showed that 83.4% of the boarding students graduated from high school as compared with a

total of 60% among their cohort candidates who did not participate in the program. 73.7% of the students who began in our fostering boarding program completed their secondary studies and the drop out rate of 26.3% is comparable to that of a group of students who attended selective academic secondary schools. Clearly, the boarding program succeeded in raising the level of high school completion for the 1961 and 1966 classes.

The disadvantaged boarding students from the 1961 class attained scores in the matriculation examinations ("bagrut") similar to or slightly higher than their non-boarding classmates in the four different schools they attended.

It is apparent from this study that at all ability levels, the boarding program has an advantage in fostering success than the regular school. This advantage is extremely large at the lower ability levels and tapers off at the higher ability levels.

In comparing the educational levels attained by the original experimental group of 78 students during the 10 years since graduation from elementary school, and the levels attained by a comparison group of 78 students selected from among the 300 candidates who were of similar ability level and SES, etc, but who were not admitted to the program -- 79% of the boarding group entered a post-secondary institution compared with 51% of the comparison group. 65% of the boarding group entered a university (as opposed to another for of post-secondary education), compared with 39% of the comparison group.

By 1971, 40% of the boarding group had attained a B.A., while only 16% of the comparison group (or 19% including external studies). Allow me to point out that Israel has universal military service following secondary school and generally university studies begin following completion of military service, hence it only appears that our students take a long time to finish university.

In closing, allow me to quote Smilansky and Nevo in their conclusions for the study:

> Based on this ten year follow-up study, we may conclude that the boarding program did succeed in creating a better educational opportunity for the gifted among the disadvantaged than did the conventional educational system...Follow-up on the first group has shown that this advantage...is retained even six years after graduation from secondary school even when no additional fostering efforts were made. The high rates of success in secondary studies of other classes...suggest that their success in higher education ...(will be similar).